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Female students to explore science, technology, engineering and math (STEM)

IDAHO FALLS – Female junior high school students from around Idaho will defend electronic tablets from cyberattacks, use chemistry and paper chromatography to solve crimes, and detect radiation during the sixth annual My Amazing Future workshop on March 1.

Eighth-graders from Idaho Falls, Blackfoot, Fort Hall, Pocatello and Twin Falls will participate in the daylong event organized by Idaho National Laboratory employees and members of Idaho Women in Nuclear (IWIN).

The goal is to pique students' interest in science, technology, engineering and math, expose them to STEM careers and encourage them to interact with the scientists and engineers who present – many of whom are female.

Teachers select students based on their interest in math and science and other factors. Organizers also target schools with larger populations of minority and disadvantaged students.

"We want students to meet women who work in these fields and learn about the STEM careers available to them," said Michelle Thiel Bingham, an INL employee who chaired the My Amazing Future steering committee. "Their future really is filled with amazing possibilities."

Students participate in several hands-on sessions designed to be educational – and fun.

During the day, they will use nuclear forensic techniques to hunt for clues at an "explosion," extract DNA from bacteria and learn to build speakers and other electronics during a session called Magneto Science. Thirteen sessions will be offered this year.

"This event really helps foster the girls' enthusiasm for STEM subjects," said Frances Marshall, an INL employee and My Amazing Future organizer. "Careers in STEM are fun and rewarding and that's what we want to show them"

The event has grown significantly since its 2007 inception, expanding from just a handful of Twin Falls students to more than 100 eighth-graders from five Idaho cities. The number of hands-on sessions and sponsors also has grown.

This year's sponsors include Portage Inc., the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality, Idaho State University, Eastern Idaho Technical College, the Eastern Idaho Engineering Council, Walsh Engineering and the Idaho chapters of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and the American Nuclear Society.

"It's become a really popular event and we've expanded based on interest from students, schools and teachers," Bingham said. "However, we wouldn't have been able to do it without the continued support of INL and all of our sponsors."

This year's event will be held at the Center for Advanced Energy Studies (CAES) in Idaho Falls as well as several INL facilities.

STEM education is a priority for the U.S. Department of Energy and Battelle Energy Alliance. Since 2006, Battelle has committed more than \$3.2 million to support STEM education in Idaho.

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